

MINING ON SEWARD PENINSULA.

By **GEORGE L. HARRINGTON.**

PLACER MINING.

SUMMARY OF MINING CONDITIONS.

During the summer of 1919 climatic conditions on Seward Peninsula were generally favorable for placer mining until the later part of September and the first few days of October, when a heavy freeze and snow cut off the water supply and necessitated the closing down of most of the plants. A brief thaw a little later permitted resumption of work for a short time, but the greater number of plants were closed down for the winter by the 1st of October, only the dredges and a few of the larger plants continuing mining after that date and most of the latter working with reduced crews. Throughout the winter season the labor situation was not satisfactory, and there was relatively little winter work. In summer the situation improved somewhat, but the 8-hour shift was accepted by a number of operators only with the greatest reluctance, especially where additional labor was not obtainable or other conditions were not such as to make a second shift practicable. At numerous places on the peninsula many of the plants were obliged to work short-handed, and a few used Eskimo labor.

Gold, tin, and platinum were recovered through some of the various methods of placer mining. No information was obtained regarding the saving of scheelite as in previous years as a by-product of placer mining for gold. Difficulty had been experienced in marketing the product in the past, and this, in connection with the labor involved, appeared to make the saving not worth while.

Gold was recovered from most of the operations, and tin (cassiterite) was obtained as usual from the York region, also in small amount as a by-product of gold mining on Goodhope River. Platinum was recovered with gold from the placer operations in the Koyuk and Buckland drainage area.

During the summer work was continued on several projects of direct or indirect benefit to the mining industry. The east jetty of the Snake River harbor was completed, and the channel was dredged to permit the entrance of small schooners to a secure harbor and their

loading and unloading without lightering, an important item in the coastwise transportation of supplies from Nome.

Work was also continued on roads throughout the peninsula, and the Candle Creek road was completed as far as claim No. 16 above Discovery, Candle Creek. At Nome the road was completed to Cape Nome. A road has also been constructed from the landing on the Koyuk to the center of mining operations on Dime Creek.

The Kougarak region appears to have the poorest transportation facilities. At present the main line of transit is the railroad, over which is run the "dogmobile." No repairs have been made on this railroad for several years, and according to reports its state of disrepair makes travel over it hazardous. The need is acute of either the construction of a wagon road or the repair and operation of the railroad to serve the needs of the miners in the Kougarak River and Iron Creek districts.

Under present conditions of operation there is frequently a shortage of much needed repair parts in Nome, as the hardware stores have decreased their stocks to include only the staple and more quickly salable goods. This has worked a very great hardship on some operators when they were in need of castings for repairs. It would appear that this difficulty might be met by the cooperative purchase of a small electric furnace, such as has been installed at Treadwell, for the making of emergency castings, thus doing away with the delay incident to shipment from Seattle. Under conditions of shipping such as prevailed in 1919 this delay may amount at times to a month or more, which may be one-third of the working season.

THAWING OF FROST IN GRAVELS.

For some years thawing has been one of the main problems in connection with the dredging of the low-grade auriferous gravels of the Nome coastal plain. The method of thawing by a series of drainage ditches and laterals in conjunction with natural drainage courses has been described in general terms by Eakin¹ and has received some consideration by owners and engineers in charge of dredging operations. At present consideration is being given to the project of making such a drainage canal to enter Snake River near the mouth of Center Creek. The initial cost and the uncertainty as to the extent of the thawed ground that would result, as well as the divided ownership of the ground, have been the main deterrents to the carrying out of this project and similar large-scale thawing operations.

Standard practice in thawing frozen gravels throughout Alaska and northern Canada has hitherto involved the use of steam. As

¹ Eakin, H. M., Placer mining in Seward Peninsula: U. S. Geol. Survey Bull. 622, pp. 368-369, 1915.

the tenor of the workable gravels has decreased, efforts to lower operating expenses have resulted in changes in details of the process, and each plant has varied the length of points, their spacing, and the time of application of steam. The greatest economies appear to have been effected by decreasing the time during which steam is applied under pressure and allowing a longer period of sweating, thus securing greater thawing efficiency for the heat units applied. Experimental work² has proved the possibility of cold-water thawing, and a number of plants have thawed frozen gravel by this method.

In 1919 cold-water thawing was used by three dredges on Seward Peninsula. On Candle Creek the Candle Creek Mining Co.'s dredge pumped water to a tank on the hillside, giving it an opportunity to warm up somewhat before being used in thawing. An even pressure was also insured by this method. In the Council region ditch water under head was used. At Nome the Alaska Mines Corporation thawed ground in advance of dredging on Flat Creek by cold water, obtaining pressure by pumping direct to the points. It is probable, however, that this company will utilize ditch water under a head, instead of pumping. Two dredges in the Iditarod district also used cold water for thawing.

Details of the processes used at all these plants are not at hand, but at the plant of the Alaska Mines Corporation, Nome, the temperature of the water used for thawing was about 55° F. It left the frozen ground at a temperature of about 34° or 35° F. After the ground is thawed the temperature of the water as it leaves is practically the same as that at which it enters. The maximum thickness of gravels thawed in 1919 was 42 feet, with as much as 20 feet of clayey material. It was stated that no trouble from unthawed blocks was experienced throughout the summer in the dredging operations. Points were spaced 10 feet on centers and left in for 7 days, and a pressure of 25 pounds was maintained by pumping. In shallower ground, 7 to 10 feet deep, at Council, where ditch water was used, points spaced 5 feet on centers were left in 48 hours.

GOLD.

Placer gold is recovered on Seward Peninsula by dredging, by underground mining, and by open-cut work including shoveling in, the use of the hydraulic giant for stripping and mining, the use of the hydraulic lift, and the use of the open hydraulic lift on the Ruble elevator. In addition to the plants engaged in producing gold, a number were doing preparatory work, such as the construction of ditches and the stripping of barren surface material from the auriferous gravels to be mined later, and in prospecting. The prospecting was mainly in the nature of proving ground already held, rather than

² Cathcart, S. H., Mining in northwestern Alaska: U. S. Geol. Survey, Bull. 712, pp. 190-194, 1920.

a search for new deposits. In general, relatively little new development of unproved ground was attempted, mainly on account of legislation permitting the holding of title to claims without the doing of assessment work.

DREDGING OPERATIONS.

During the summer of 1919 a total of 22 gold dredges were in operation for varying periods, as compared with 21 in 1918. They were distributed as follows: Nome district, 7; Council district, 8; Solomon district, 4; Kougarak, Fairhaven, and Port Clarence districts, 1 each. A number of other dredges were idle for various reasons, chiefly on account of reconstruction or moving to other localities. Some were idle, however, while additional areas were being proved or prepared for dredging. In the Nome district the Alaska Mines Corporation operated one dredge on Flat Creek, but the other dredges of this company were idle, though some were undergoing repairs and reconstruction. James Bellevue was rebuilding a dredge on Dry Creek. The Bangor and Hastings Creek dredges, operated in 1918, were idle in 1919. Included in the list of dredges in the Nome district is that operated by William Rowe on Snake River, primarily for the purpose of deepening the channel of the river as a part of the Nome harbor project; but the dredge was also operated to save the gold content of the gravels handled.

In the Council district the Crooked Creek and Melsing Creek dredges were again working. The Moody Mining Co.'s dredge was idle, but the company expects to operate this dredge in 1920. Changes contemplated for 1920 include moving the Elkhorn dredge (G. & O. Dredging Co.) to Warm Creek and the Camp Creek dredge of the Uplift Mining Co. to Golofnin.

At Solomon four dredges were operating, as compared with five in 1918, the Scott & Newburg dredge being idle. One of the Kimball dredges was dismantled for shipment to Kuskokwim River. This dredge was in Seattle late in 1918, awaiting transportation.

During the summer of 1918 the Kelliher dredge in the Kougarak was idle, the owners being engaged in stripping ground for future operations. In the Port Clarence district, neither the Dobson dredge nor that of the Alaska American Gold Mining Co. (Bernard dredge) has worked regularly since 1917. During the summer of 1919 prospecting was being done by the owners of the Dobson dredge, with a view to the resumption of operations. A dredge reported to have been brought from Serpentine River was being reconstructed on Sunset Creek, near Teller, and is said to have been operated for a short time late in September and early in October. In the Fairhaven precinct only one dredge was operating, that on Candle Creek. Low water in the spring again prevented the movement of the Iver Johnson dredge from the Kugruk to Candle Creek. The dredge on the Inmachuk was idle also.

It is reported that on Bonanza Creek, a tributary of Ungalik River, at the base of Seward Peninsula, dredging ground was purchased and some development work was done upon it.

The following is a list of gold dredges operating in 1919 on Seward Peninsula, in addition to which two tin dredges were also working in the Port Clarence precinct:

NOME, DISTRICT.

Dexter Creek Dredging Co.....	Dexter Creek.
Arctic Creek dredge.....	Arctic Creek.
Center Creek Dredging Co.....	Snake River.
Wm. Rowe.....	Snake River.
Guinan & Ames.....	Glacier Creek.
Julien Mining Co.....	Osborn Creek.
Alaska Mines Corporation.....	Flat Creek.

COUNCIL DISTRICT.

Fernegal & Hanson dredge.....	Crooked Creek.
Wild Goose Mining & Trading Co.....	Ophir Creek.
Blue Goose Mining Co.....	Ophir Creek.
Northern Light Mining Co.....	Ophir Creek.
G. & O. dredge (formerly Elkhorn dredge).....	Niukluk River.
Uplift Mining Co.....	Niukluk River.
Flume Gold Dredging Co.....	Melsing Creek.
Adams & Wik.....	Goose Creek.

SOLOMON DISTRICT.

Eskimo Dredging Co.....	Solomon River.
Shovel Creek Gold Dredging Co.....	Solomon River.
Flower dredge.....	Solomon River.
Burners, Iverson & Johnson dredge.....	Big Hurrah Creek.

KOUGAROK DISTRICT.

Behring Dredging Co.....	Kougarok River.
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FAIRHAVEN DISTRICT.

Candle Creek Mining Co.....	Candle Creek.
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PORT CLARENCE DISTRICT.

Dr. Andrews.....	Sunset Creek.
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Most of the dredges use distillate for fuel, though some are using crude oil. A number of dredges are equipped with internal-combustion engines, and a few have been equipped for electric operation, including the Wild Goose dredge at Council, which obtains hydroelectric power generated by ditch water, and the Flat Creek dredge at Nome, which obtains its power from a steam-driven turbo-generator fired with fuel oil.

During the summer of 1919 a representative of the company that is planning to develop hydroelectric power from a plant in the Kigluak Mountains was in Nome making a survey of potential power

users on Seward Peninsula. Should it prove feasible to develop power from this source, at a reasonable cost, the plant should solve the often difficult problem of fuel for the dredges of the Nome, Council, and Solomon districts and should prove a potent factor in the dredging of the large areas of low-grade auriferous gravels in the vicinity of Nome.

It is estimated that the 22 gold dredges on Seward Peninsula in 1919 employed 183 men and had a gold yield of \$450,000, compared with a yield of \$469,000 by 21 dredges in 1918.

UNDERGROUND MINING.

There was a very notable decrease in both underground and open-cut mining on Seward Peninsula during 1917 and 1918, and this decrease continued in 1919. It is to be attributed to a number of causes. The high-grade placers, which can be mined profitably by small-scale operations, are gradually approaching exhaustion. Those that are not exhausted are being consolidated into larger holdings, to be mined more economically by larger operations extending over a period of years. The increased cost of practically all supplies, of transportation, and to a lesser extent of labor have made unprofitable the mining of much ground which could formerly have been worked at a profit. The higher wages paid in the manufacturing industries in the Western States for the labor formerly employed, much of it skilled or semiskilled, have attracted and held many of those formerly engaged in mining, so that there is an actual shortage of labor for the mining industry. As a result there are fewer men engaged in the search for and development of new deposits during those seasons of the year when relatively little mining is being done.

In 1919 about 17 deep placer mines were worked in Seward Peninsula. It is estimated that 10 mines were worked during the winter and 7 in the summer, employing about 78 men. The operations so far as known were distributed as indicated in the following list:

Deep placer gold mines worked on Seward Peninsula, 1919.

	Number of mines.	Men em- ployed.
Nome district.....	4	10
Fairhaven district.....	7	28
Koyuk district.....	6	40
	17	78

By far the largest part of the production from the deep placer mines was made during the winter, and operations of this type were relatively less productive in the summer of 1919; moreover, there were fewer mines in operation.

OPEN-CUT WORK.

In the summer of 1919, 74 open-cut mines, including 24 hydraulic plants, were operated, employing an approximate total of 332 men. Operations were distributed by districts as follows:

Open-cut gold placer mines on Seward Peninsula, 1919.

	Hydraulic plants.	Other open-cut operations.	Men employed.
Nome district.....	9	8	140
Solomon district.....	4	1	13
Council district.....	2	1	21
Kougarok district.....	4	18	42
Fairhaven district.....	5	10	81
Port Clarence district.....		7	14
Koyuk district.....		5	21
	24	50	332

Included in the list of hydraulic operations are the plants using Ruble elevators on Bear Creek and at Candle, in the Fairhaven district. Two plants in the Nome district and one on Inmachuk River used hydraulic lifts. Under "Other open-cut operations" are placed three plants, two of which were engaged in the preparation of ground for dredging and one in the construction of a ditch preparatory to mining.

PRODUCTION.

There were 91 gold placer mines and 22 gold dredges operated on Seward Peninsula in 1919. Approximately 550 men were employed in these operations, and the production is estimated at \$1,400,000.

Gold and silver produced on Seward Peninsula, 1897-1919.

Year.	Gold.		Silver.	
	Quantity (fine ounces).	Value.	Quantity (fine ounces).	Value.
1897.....	725.63	\$15,000	87	\$52
1898.....	3,628.12	75,000	435	256
1899.....	135,450.00	2,800,000	16,254	9,752
1900.....	229,781.25	4,750,000	27,574	17,097
1901.....	199,822.61	4,130,700	24,579	14,747
1902.....	220,677.07	4,561,800	26,481	14,035
1903.....	215,994.38	4,465,000	24,171	13,052
1904.....	201,462.52	4,164,600	24,175	14,021
1905.....	232,200.00	4,800,000	27,864	16,997
1906.....	352,812.50	7,500,000	43,537	29,605
1907.....	338,625.00	7,000,000	25,497	16,828
1908.....	247,680.00	5,120,000	20,577	10,905
1909.....	207,077.50	4,260,000	20,871	10,853
1910.....	169,312.50	3,500,000	20,317	10,971
1911.....	149,962.50	3,100,000	17,996	9,718
1912.....	145,125.00	3,000,000	17,415	10,710
1913.....	120,937.50	2,500,000	12,094	7,305
1914.....	130,612.50	2,700,000	15,673	8,667
1915.....	140,287.50	2,900,000	17,510	8,878
1916.....	142,706.25	2,950,000	14,271	9,391
1917.....	125,775.00	2,600,000	13,770	11,346
1918.....	53,599.50	1,108,000	6,022	6,022
1919.....	65,790.00	1,360,000	6,940	7,773
	3,830,044.83	79,360,100	424,110	258,981

TIN.

The dredges of the American Tin Mining Co. and the York Tin Dredging Co. were both in operation in 1919, the American on Buck Creek and the York on Grouse Creek. Three men were engaged in shoveling into sluice boxes on Buck Creek above the dredge. A total of 25 men were engaged in tin mining, and the production was about 56 tons.

In addition to the recovery in the York region a few hundred pounds of tin concentrates were saved in connection with gold mining on Humboldt Creek, a tributary of Goodhope River. These concentrates were not shipped in 1919.

PLATINUM.

In 1919, as in previous years, platinum was recovered with the gold on Bear, Dime, and Sweepstakes creeks at the base of Seward Peninsula. The production was probably about 20 ounces.

LODE MINING.

There was relatively little lode mining on Seward Peninsula in 1919. Assessment work was done on a few properties, and title to other claims, on which no assessment work was done, was maintained by the filing of the necessary affidavits.

GOLD.

One gold lode mine near Bluff is said to have operated during the winter, and the ore mined was milled during the summer by means of water power.

TIN.

A crew of about 12 men is reported to have worked at the tin mine on Lost River during the winter of 1918-19, and about 25 men during the summer. The winter work consisted mainly of retimbering, enlargement of drifts and shafts, and deepening of shafts. A number of buildings were erected, and a compressor plant was installed to furnish air for drills and for ventilation. A large warehouse was also built on the beach at the mouth of the river. A considerable shipment of mining machinery and supplies for this property was unloaded at the mouth of Lost River from the freighter *Cordova* in October, 1919.

SILVER-LEAD.

The silver-lead prospect on Kugruk River near Independence Creek was further developed during 1919, a crew of 6 to 14 men working throughout the year. The work appears to have consisted mainly in sinking the shaft. Data regarding the amount of lateral development are not at hand. A considerable amount of ore has been mined during the development work but has not been shipped

owing to difficulties of transportation. An effort is said to have been made to get a shipment of ore down the Kugruk in small scows. Low water during the spring when a high stage was expected prevented these boats from getting down the river. Additional development work was to be done during the winter of 1919-20.

The principal difficulty in operating this property seems to lie in the transportation of supplies to the mine and of the ore from the mine. The experience in 1919 indicates that shipments of ore down the river will probably not prove feasible, and it will doubtless be necessary to haul the ore to Candle or Deering. The Candle road has been constructed from Candle as far up Candle Creek as claim No. 16, and it will probably prove most economical to extend this road to the mine rather than to build all the way to Deering. An aerial tram may prove more economical than road haulage, should it be found that a large tonnage will have to be handled. The possibility of developing power for the operation of the tram from the coal found on the Kugruk may make this method of haulage the most economical.

COAL.

Coal has been obtained for a number of years from the Kugruk coal beds, having been mined on Chicago Creek and on the Kugruk between Reindeer and Montana creeks. This coal is used extensively in Candle and Deering at times when the supply from British Columbia or Washington is insufficient for heating and generating power for mining.

Applications for permits to mine coal for two years at these two localities were made and permits granted during September, 1919. It is the intention of the operators to mine coal for the local use of Candle and Deering and for use at the silver-lead mine on the Kugruk. Most of the product of these mines will be hauled in winter.

A permit was also issued in September, 1919, to mine coal on the Koyuk $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from its mouth, presumably for use on Dime Creek.

In 1918 three permits to mine coal on Unalaklik River for two years were issued, and some coal was hauled by small vessels to Nome and St. Michael, but none was reported for 1919.

OIL DRILLING.

Additional drilling has been done near Hastings Creek in the endeavor to find oil, a hole 350 feet in depth being reported. As indicated by Cathcart,³ the drilling is being done in an area of metamorphic and igneous rocks—formations which contain no oil—and the hopes of obtaining oil in this locality are ill founded

³ Cathcart, S. H., Mining in northwestern Alaska: U. S. Geol. Survey Bull. 712, p. 197, 1920.

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INDEX.

A.	Page.
Acknowledgments for aid.....	4
Admiralty-Alaska Gold Mining Co., operations by.....	115-116
Admiralty Island, operations on.....	113-118
water power on.....	187
Alaska Copper Co., removal of, from Nugget Creek.....	190
Alaska-Ebner mine, development at.....	107
Alaska Gastineau Mining Co., operations by.....	106
Alaska-Juneau mine, operation of.....	106-107
improvements in milling at.....	106
Alaska Peninsula, copper deposits on.....	35
Alaska Range, occurrence of copper in.....	35
Alaskan Engineering Commission, coal mining by.....	48-49
Allotments and appropriations.....	97-98
Annette Island, water power on.....	187
Annex Creek at Taku Inlet, water power on..	184
Antimony, occurrence and production of....	39, 81
Appropriations and allotments.....	97-98
Archangel Creek, mining on.....	204
Arolic basin, Goodnews Bay region, placer mining in.....	221, 222, 227
Asbestos, occurrence of.....	228
Austin, J. F., development work by.....	205
 B.	
Bailey Bay, Shelockum Lake outlet at.....	155-156
Baranof Island, water power on.....	186
Baranof Lake outlet at Baranof, Baranof Island.....	163-164
Barite, occurrences of.....	54
Bear Creek, Goodnews Bay region, placer mining on.....	222, 226-227
Beaver Falls Creek, Revillagigedo Island, water power on.....	185
Benito Creek, gold-bearing quartz vein on..	193-194
Bering River field, availability of coal in..	47, 48-49
development in.....	73
Big Port Walter, Baranof Island, water power on.....	186
Bismuth, occurrence of.....	41
Blue Quartz Mining Co., mineralization on claims of.....	203
Bonnifield district, production in.....	85-86
Bradfield Canal, streams tributary to, water power on.....	185-186
Brassel Bros., development by.....	202
Broad Pass district. <i>See</i> Chulitna Valley.	
Brooklyn-Willow Creek Gold Mining Co., development work on claims of....	204

	Page.
Brooks, Alfred H., administrative work of..	99, 100
preface by.....	3-4
The future of Alaska mining.....	5-57
and Martin, George C., Administrative report.....	97-103
The Alaskan mining industry (1919)....	59-95
Buck Creek, tin dredging on.....	71
Building materials, occurrence of.....	54-55
Burch, T. R., work of.....	100
Burr, J. F., development work by.....	205
Butte Creek, Goodnews Bay region, mining on.....	221, 227
 C.	
Candle Creek, Fairhaven district, dredging on.....	232, 233
Canfield, George H., field work of.....	100
Water-power investigations in southeastern Alaska.....	143-187
Capps, S. R., field work of.....	101
Carroll Inlet, Revillagigedo Island, Swan Lake outlet at.....	151-152
Carlson Creek at Sunny Cove.....	173-174
at Taku Inlet, water power on.....	184
Carlson Lake outlet at Taku Harbor, water power on.....	185
Cascade Creek at Thomas Bay, near Petersburg.....	159-160
at Thomas Bay, water power on.....	185
Cathcart, S. H., field work of.....	101
Chandalar district, production in.....	89-90
Chapin, Theodore, cited.....	141-142
Lode developments in the Willow Creek district.....	201-206
Mining developments in the Matanuska coal fields.....	197-199
work of.....	101-102
Chester Lake, Annette Island, water power on.....	187
Chichagof, Falls Creek at Nickel, near.....	179-180
Chichagof Island, water power on.....	187
Chickaloon coal mine, operation of.....	199
Chickamin River, tributary of, water power on.....	186
Chisana district, production in.....	84
Chitina district, copper mining in.....	69
Chitina-Kuskulana Copper Co.'s property, mineralization and equipment of.....	192-194
Chitina River valley, sources of information on.....	189
Chititu Creek, operations on.....	196

	Page.		Page.
Chromite, deposits of.....	40	E.	
Chulitna Valley, copper deposits in.....	33	Eagle district, production in.....	89
Circle district, production in.....	87-88	Eakin, J. R., field work of.....	101
Clay, occurrences of.....	54	Eakin, H. M., cited.....	114
Cleary Creek, production on.....	80, 81	Endicott-Alaska Mining & Milling Co., operations by.....	109, 111-112
Coal, availability of.....	46-49, 80	Endicott River, water power on.....	184
consumption of.....	74	Eska coal mine, operation of.....	197-199
deposits of.....	43, 46-51	Ester Creek, production on.....	81
market for.....	50-51		
market value of, conditions affecting.....	46-47	F.	
mining of.....	48-49	Fairangel Creek, mineralization on.....	203
in the Kugruk and Koyuk fields.....	237	Fairbanks Creek, production on.....	80, 81
production of.....	50, 72-73	Fairbanks district, production in.....	79-81
publications on.....	43-46	Falls Creek at Nickel, near Chichagof.....	179-180
Coal fields, available, location and areas of.....	47	water power on.....	187
Coallands, conditions affecting leases of.....	49, 50	Farragut River, water power on.....	187
Comet, Sherman Creek at, water power on.....	184	Fern & Goodell, development by.....	204
Cook Inlet region, coal mining in.....	78	Field work, record of.....	97, 100-101
work in.....	101	Fish Creek near Sealevel, Revillagigedo Island.....	149-150
Copper, deposits of, enrichment of.....	14-15	water power on.....	186
deposits of, in southeastern Alaska.....	15-19	Fishhook Creek, mining on.....	204
in the Alaska Range.....	35	Flat Creek, Nome district, dredging on.....	232, 233
in the Copper River region.....	25-31	Floreys, C. H., acknowledgment to.....	100
in the Iliamna region.....	33-34	Forest Service, cooperation of.....	100
in the Nabesna-White River region.....	34-35	Fortymile district, production in.....	88-89
in the Noatak-Kobuk region.....	36	Funter Bay, Admiralty Island, description of geology of shores of.....	113-115
in the Russian Mountains.....	35	map of mining claims on.....	112
in the Susitna Valley region.....	31-33	operations on.....	115-118
on Alaska Peninsula.....	35	Future of mining, data available for fore- casting.....	6-7
on Prince William Sound.....	20-25		
on Seward Peninsula.....	35-36	G.	
production of.....	36, 68-69	Garnets, occurrence of.....	55
1900-1919.....	12-14	Georgetown district, discoveries in.....	61
Copper River region, deposits of copper in.....	25-31	Giant Gold Mining Co., development by.....	204
operations in.....	76-77	Glaciation, effect of, on copper deposits.....	14-15
work in.....	100	Gold, discoveries of.....	61
Cost of gold mining, advances in.....	105, 106	dredging of.....	67-68
Craigie Creek, mining on.....	202, 203	lode mining of.....	63-64
Crater Lake outlet at Port Snettisham, water power on.....	185	mining of, depression in.....	105
at Speel River, Port Snettisham.....	166-168	progress in methods of.....	7-8
Crooked Creek, Council district, dredging on.....	232, 233	placer mining of.....	64-68
		production of, on Seward Peninsula.....	235, 236
D.		1880-1919.....	7-9, 62-68
Dan Creek, operations on.....	196	in Alaska and the world, diagram showing.....	8
Davies Creek, Berners Bay, water power on.....	184	resources of.....	9-12
Decline in mining, causes of.....	5-6	Gold Creek at Juneau.....	177-178
in 1919.....	59-60	water power on.....	184
Deep Lake, Annette Island, water power on.....	187	Gold Hill district, production in.....	91
Developments in 1919.....	61	Goldstream Creek, production on.....	80, 81
Dexter Creek, Nome district, dredging on.....	233	Goodnews Bay region, animal life in.....	213-215
Diagram showing gold production of Alaska and the world, 1880-1919.....	8	asbestos in.....	228
showing mineral production, 1880-1919.....	6	climate of.....	211-212
Discoveries in 1919.....	61	coal near.....	228
Distribution of mineral resources, map of Alaska showing.....	In pocket.	field work in.....	101, 207-208
Dome Creek, production on.....	80, 81	geography of.....	208-209
Douglas Island, operations on.....	112-113	geologic sketch map of.....	214
water power on.....	187	geology of.....	215-220
Dredging, condition of.....	67	glaciation in.....	209-211
sources of power for.....	233-234	history, geologic, of.....	219-220
Duntun mine, mineralization and develop- ment of.....	127-128	history of mining in.....	220-222

	Page.
Goodnews Bay region, igneous rocks of	218-219
inhabitants of	215
mineral resources of	220-228
nivation in	210
placer mining in	222-228
sedimentary rocks of	216-218
structure of	216
transportation and mail service to	210-211
vegetation of	212-213
Granite, distribution of	54
Graphite, deposits of	54-55
Graves, Miss Lucy, work of	100
Green Lake outlet at Silver Bay, near Sitka	161-162
water power on	186
Grindstone Creek at Taku Inlet	171-172
water power on	184
Grouse Creek, tin dredging on	71
Gypsum, mining of	54, 75

H.

Harrington, George L., field work of	101
Mineral resources of the Goodnews Bay region	207-228
Mining on Seward Peninsula	229-237
Hasselborg Lake outlet, water power on	185
Hatcher, J. B., claims prospected by	205-206
Hobart Bay, stream entering, water power on	185
Hot Springs district, production in	71, 82
tin deposits in	37
Humboldt Creek, tin recovered on	71

I.

Iditarod district, production in	92
Iliamna region, copper deposits in	33-34
Indian River district, production in	91
Innokko district, production in	91-92
Iron, deposits of	41-43

J.

Jade, occurrence of	55
Jualin-Alaska Mines Co., development work by	107-108
Juneau, Gold Creek at	177-178
Juneau district, operations in	105-118

K.

Kantishna district, operations and production in	84-85
silver-lead discovery in	61
Karta River at Karta Bay, Prince of Wales Island	157-158
water power on	187
Kenai Peninsula, operations on	78
Kennecott Corporation, operations by	194-195
Kennecott mines, ore bodies of	25, 26-28
Ketchikan Creek at Ketchikan	146-149
Ketchikan district, copper deposits in	15-19
iron deposits in	41-43
operations in	118-128
production in	19
Kobuk River, operations on	95
Kosciusko Island, water power on	187

Kotsina-Chitina district, copper deposits of	25-30
conditions of mining in	30-31
production in	31
publications on	23
Kougarok region, transportation in	230
Kowkowi Creek, Goodnews Bay region, mining on	221, 222, 227
Koyukuk district, production in	90
Kuskokwim region, access to	91
field work in	101
operations in	93-94
Kuskulana River basin, copper deposits in	29-30
operations in	190-194

L.

Larsen, J. B., work begun by	205
Lead, occurrence and production of	36-37, 70
Le Roi Mining Co., development by	205
Lignite. <i>See</i> Coal and Coalfields.	
Limestone, distribution of	54
Little Eldorado Creek, production on	81
Little Gem Gold Mining Co., development work by	204
Little Susitna River, mineralization on	205-206
Lode mining of gold, condition of	63-64
Lodes, gold, widespread occurrence of	11-12
Long Lake outlet at Speel River, water power on	185
Long River below Second Lake, at Port Snettisham	169-170
Lost River, development on	71
Loveland-Alaska Mining Co., development by	204
Lynn Canal, geology of west side of	109-111

M.

McGrath, Kuskokwim region, discoveries near	61, 93
Maddren, A. G., cited	220-221
Mahoney Creek, Revillagigedo Island, water power on	185
Map, geologic, of Goodnews Bay region	214
of Alaska, showing distribution of mineral resources	In pocket.
of mining claims, Funter Bay, Admiralty Island	112
of Salmon-Unuk River region	130
of Willow Creek district	202
Maps, topographic, issued or in preparation in 1919	103
Marble, distribution and quarrying of	54, 75
Marshall district, production in	92-93
Martin, George C., administrative work of	99, 100
field work of	101
Brooks, Alfred H., and, Administrative report	97-103
The Alaskan mining industry in 1919	59-95
Matanuska field, availability of coal in	47, 48-49
mining in	197-199
Materials, structural and miscellaneous, occurrence of	54-55
production of	75
Mercury. <i>See</i> Quicksilver.	

	Page.		P.	Page.
Mertie, J. B., jr., field work of.....	100	Pacific Coast States, coal consumption of....		50
Lode mining in the Juneau and Ketchikan districts.....	105-128	Palladium, occurrence and production of....		38, 71
Notes on the Salmon-Unuk River region.....	129-142	Patterson Bay, Baranof Island, water power on.....		187
Melsing Creek, Council district, dredging on.....	232, 233	Peat, distribution of.....		51
Midni Island, occurrence of copper on.....	35	utilization of.....		51-52
Mill Creek near Wrangell, water power on....	187	Pendleton, T. P., field work of.....		101
Millanson Lake, Annette Island, water power on.....	187	Perseverance mine, operation of.....		106
Mining, gold-lode, obstacles to.....	11-12	Petersburg, Cascade Creek at Thomas Bay, near.....		159-160
Mining claims, exemption from assessment, work on.....	189	Peterson Creek, gold-bearing quartz veins on.....		203
Mining industry, outlook for.....	56-57	Peterson Lake outlet, near Eagle River Landing, water power on.....		184
Moffit, Fred H., field work of.....	100	Peterson mine, operations at.....		109
Mining in Chitina Valley.....	189-196	Petroleum, occurrence of.....		52-53, 74
Molybdenite, occurrence of.....	41	production of.....		74-75
Molybdenum, mining of.....	118-119	shipments of, to Alaska.....		75
Montana Creek, water power on.....	184	utilization of.....		53
Moose Creek copper claims, description of.....	206	Placer mining, condition of.....		64-68
Mount Wrangell Copper Co., holdings of....	193	Placers, gold, extent of.....		9-11
Myrtle Creek at Myrtle Lake outlet, Prince of Wales Island, water power on.....	187	Platinum, production of, on Seward Peninsula.....		236
at Niblack.....	144-145	Platinum metals, occurrence and production of.....		38, 71-72
at Niblack Lake outlet, water power on....	187	publications on.....		38
N.		Porcupine Creek near Nickel.....		181-182
Nabesna-White River region, copper deposits in.....	34-35	water power on.....		187
Nenana lignite field, operations in.....	86-87	Port Houghton, stream entering, water power on.....		185
railroad connection with.....	61, 73, 80	Portland Canal district, discoveries in.....		61
tests of lignite from.....	86-87	Port Snettisham, Crater Lake outlet at Speed River.....		166-168
Niblack, Prince of Wales Island, Myrtle Creek at.....	144-145	Long River below Second Lake at.....		169-170
Niblack Lake outlet, Myrtle Creek at, water power on.....	187	Potash, occurrence of.....		55
Nickel, occurrence of.....	40	Prince of Wales Island, gaging-station records on.....		144-145, 157-158
Nickel, Falls Creek at, near Chichagof.....	179-180	operations on.....		118-128
Porcupine Creek near.....	181-182	water power on.....		187
Niukluk River, Council district, dredging on.....	233	Prince William Sound, conditions of mining on.....		21-25
Nivation in the Goodnews Bay region.....	210	copper deposits on.....		20-25
Nizina district, placer mining in.....	69	operations on.....		69, 77
Noatak-Kobuk region, copper-bearing lodes in.....	36	production on.....		24
Norris Creek at Norris Glacier, water power on.....	185	publications on.....		20
North Midas Copper Co.'s property, ore body and equipment of.....	191-192	Production, 1880-1919.....		61
Nowell-Otterson claims, mineralization and development of.....	116-118	1880-1919, diagram showing.....		6
Nugget Creek, Chitina Valley, operations on, suspended by Alaska Copper Co.....	190	1918 and 1919.....		60
Nugget Creek, Mendenhall Glacier, water power on.....	184	Publications issued or in preparation in 1919.....		102-103
O.		Pumice, occurrences of.....		54
Office at Anchorage, purposes of.....	101-102	Purches Creek, copper deposit on.....		202-203
Opal group, mineralization on.....	205	gold-bearing quartz vein on.....		203
Ophir Creek, Council district, dredging on....	233	Q.		
Orchard Lake outlet at Shrimp Bay, Revillagigedo Island.....	152-154	Quicksilver, occurrence and production of... 39-40		
water power on.....	186	R.		
Outline, historical.....	5-6	Rampart district, production in.....		83
Outlook for the mining industry.....	56-57	Reed Creek, development on.....		205
Overbeck, R. M., field work of.....	101	Reindeer in the Goodnews Bay region.....		214
		Reports. See Publications.		
		Revillagigedo Island, gaging-station records on.....		149, 154
		water power on.....		186

	Page.		Page.
Reynolds Creek at Coppermount, water power on.....	185	Snettisham, Sweetheart Falls Creek near.....	165-166, 185
Richardson district, production in.....	83-84	Solomon River, Seward Peninsula, dredging on.....	232, 233
Rock, W. F., development work by.....	204	Southeastern Alaska, copper deposits in.....	15-19
Ruby district, production in.....	91	copper mining in.....	69
Rush & Brown mine, operation of.....	121	field work in.....	100
ore bodies in.....	119-121	gaging-station records in.....	143-187
Russian Mountains, copper in.....	35	lead mining in.....	70
S.		production in.....	76
Salmon Creek near Juneau, water power on.....	184	Southwestern Alaska, developments in.....	78
Salmon River valley, geography of.....	138-139	Speel River at Port Snettisham, Crater Lake outlet at.....	166-168
geology of.....	139	at Port Snettisham, water power on.....	185
mining in.....	140-142	Springs, hot, distribution of.....	56
ore deposits in.....	139-140	mineral, distribution of.....	56
Salmon-Unuk River region, geography of.....	129, 131-134	Spruce Creek at and near Windham Bay.....	183
geology of.....	134-137	Statistics, collection of.....	102
map of.....	130	Sulphur, deposits of.....	55, 75
mineral resources of.....	137-142	Summary of mineral resources.....	56-57
sources of information on.....	129-130	Sunny Cove, Carlson Creek at.....	173-174
transportation to and in.....	133-134	Sunset Creek, Port Clarence district, dredging on.....	232, 233
Salt Chuck mine, composition of ores of.....	123-124	Susitna coal field, mining in.....	78
mineralization of.....	121-122	Susitna Valley region, conditions of mining in.....	33
operation of.....	126-127	copper deposits in.....	31-33
origin of ore bodies in.....	124-125	prospecting for copper in.....	69
Sargent, R. H., field work of.....	101	publications on.....	32
Scope of the report.....	3-4	upper, operations in.....	78
Sea level, Revillagigedo Island, Fish Creek near.....	140-150	work in.....	101
Second Lake, Baranof Island, water power on.....	157	Swan Lake outlet at Carroll Inlet, Revillagigedo Island.....	151-152
Second Lake, Long River below, at Port Snettisham.....	169-176	water power on.....	186
Seward Peninsula, coal mining on.....	237	Sweetheart Falls Creek near Snettisham.....	165-166
conditions of mining on.....	223-230	water power on.....	185
copper-bearing deposits on.....	35-36		
dredging on.....	232-234		
drilling for oil on.....	237		
field work on.....	101		
lode mining on.....	236-237		
open-cut placer mining on.....	235		
operations on.....	94-95		
production on.....	235-237		
silver-lead mining on.....	236-237		
tin deposits on.....	37-38		
tin mining on.....	236		
Shakan, molybdenite lode near.....	118		
Shear-zone deposits, nature of.....	17-18, 20-24		
Sheep Creek at Thane, water power on.....	184		
near Thane.....	175-176		
Shellockum Lake outlet at Bailey Bay.....	155-156		
water power on.....	186		
Sherman Creek at Comet, water power on.....	184		
Shrimp Bay, Revillagigedo Island, Orchard Lake outlet at.....	152-154		
Silver, occurrence and production of.....	36-37		
production of, 1880-1919.....	62-66		
on Seward Peninsula.....	235, 236		
Silver Bay, near Sitka, Green Lake outlet at.....	161-162		
Sitka, Green Lake outlet at Silver Bay, near.....	161-162		
Snake River, Nome district, dredging on.....	232, 233		

T.

Taiya Inlet, stream on west shore of, water power on.....	184
Taku Inlet, Grindstone Creek at.....	171-172
Tamgas Lake, Annette Island, water power on.....	187
Tease Lake outlet at Port Snettisham, water power on.....	185
Tellurides, report of, in the Willow Creek district.....	201
Thane, Sheep Creek near.....	175-176
Thawing of gravels, changes in processes for.....	230-231
Thomas Bay, near Petersburg, Cascade Creek at.....	159-160
Thurmond, F. L., acknowledgment to.....	206
Tin, mining of.....	236
occurrence and production of.....	37-38, 70-71, 83
publications on.....	37
production of.....	70-71
Tolovana district, production in.....	82
Tolstoi district, production in.....	91-92
Transportation, need for.....	60
need for, in the Kantishna district.....	85
Treadwell Co., operations by.....	112-113
Treadwell mine ditch, Douglas Island, water power on.....	187

	Page.		Page.
Tungsten, occurrence and production of.....	39, 81	Wattamus Creek, Goodnews Bay region, mining on.....	221-222, 225-226
Turner Lake outlet, Taku Inlet, water power on.....	185	White River basin, copper deposits in.....	34
U.		William Henry Bay, geology of shores of... 109-111	
Unalaska Island, occurrence of copper on....	35	Willow Creek district, development in.....	64
Unuk River region, gold deposits in.....	138	map of.....	202
map of.....	130	operations in.....	77, 201-206
V.		Willow Creek mines, operations by.....	202
Vault Creek, production on.....	80, 81	Wilson, J. B., claims located by.....	206
W.		Windham Bay, Spruce Creek at and near....	183
War, fluctuations caused by.....	5-6	Wrangell district, copper deposits in.....	19
War Baby mine, operation of.....	202	Y.	
Water power, distribution of.....	55-56	Yentna district, operations in.....	77-78
in southeastern Alaska, data on.....	183-187	York district, tin deposits in.....	37-38
		Yukon region, field work in.....	101
		production in.....	78-7

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